

November 11, 1862.

Professor Huxley, F.R.S., V.P., in the Chair.

The Secretary read the following extracts from a letter addressed to him by Dr. Lamprey, dated Shanghai, July 31st, 1862:—

“I have forwarded by H.M. Steam Transport ‘Urgent,’ which sailed from Shanghai on the 14th inst., three couples of the *Phasianus superbus*; at least, I suppose this to be the proper designation of these birds from their fulfilling the description of that bird in the ‘Naturalist’s Library.’ I procured six males last winter at Tien Tsin, where they were sold in the market for the table, like other game-birds. The beauty of the birds, then in good plumage, and the remarkable length of their tail-feathers were very striking; and I hope their safe arrival in England will afford an opportunity of seeing them recover their plumage and tails, which have been sadly damaged by confinement. Subsequently I procured five females of the same species by sending a man to the interior, north of Pekin, where they are to be found—though I have strong suspicions that all my specimens came from the Tung Ling, or eastern burial-place of the Emperors, situated some distance north-east of Pekin, in a mountainous district. It is the custom to place all kinds of game in the extensively enclosed grounds of the Imperial burial-places, where they are carefully preserved; but no doubt the mandarins in charge make a good perquisite by disposing of the superfluous stock every winter.

“These birds are, however, to be found in the mountainous country north of Pekin, in Shantung, also in Shansi; in the latter province, I am informed, there is also a Pheasant of a beautiful scarlet colour, though of very small size. I have seen a drawing of this bird in a mandarin’s house in Tien Tsin, and would have supposed it to be a sketch from fancy, were it not that I was previously informed of the existence of a bird of which this might have been a good representation. With regard to the drawings of birds on Chinese fans, screens, &c., I was hitherto, like others, under the impression that they were altogether imaginary; the brilliant colouring, attitudes, almost grotesque, and strange outlines lead one to this conclusion; but from seeing a great variety of birds in the country, and having had the opportunity of comparing them with Chinese drawings, I find that they are all more or less good representations of birds which exist in reality. Unfortunately that which constitutes the chief merit of a Chinese artist is his skill in sketching from memory; otherwise, were they to pay more attention to minute detail, their drawings would give us a good idea of the ornithology of the country.

“It might be said that the foregoing remarks do not hold good with regard to the Fung or Phoenix of the Chinese, which is evidently one of the Pheasant tribe: it does not require any close examination of the Chinese drawing to see this, which corroborates in a great measure the notions of the early western philosophers, who held that the Phoenix was derived from a Pheasant, and not from an

Eagle, which is the form generally given to the representation of it in heraldry, &c., and current among westerns of the present day. It may yet be discovered, by some explorer of the extensive mountain-ranges adjacent on all sides to the north of China, that there is a bird in plumage and general character resembling the Fung; perhaps it may be a hybrid between two of the Pheasant tribe.

"I have seen, in all, four distinct kinds of Pheasants in the markets of Tien Tsin: the uninterrupted cold of winter allows of their being brought in large quantities from remote places, and preserves them fit for use till the spring. Of one of these Pheasants I sent a specimen last year to Mr. Swinhoe, Consul of Formosa, and one of your corresponding members, which he describes as being 'a kind of *Crossoptilon*, perhaps the female of the *C. tibetanum*.' The bird had all the appearance of a male, in having spurs, though it was impossible to ascertain its sex, as it had been previously gutted. No doubt this bird will be brought to your notice by this zealous naturalist on his arrival in England. During the last winter, I procured another fine specimen of this bird; but after preparing the skin, a young dog unfortunately got at it and tore it up. Its plumage was the same as that of the previous specimen. The meat of this kind of Pheasant is exceedingly delicate, and the body is nearly as bulky as that of a small-sized Turkey.

"Another kind of Pheasant found in the Tien Tsin market bears out the description of the *Euplocamus pucrasia* of the 'Naturalist's Library,' so common on the hills in India. Although the preserved skins of this bird are in too bad a condition for mounting, they may serve to identify the species. They remained too long in a frozen state to admit of their being preserved properly.

"In the event of the *P. superbus* not reaching home alive, I have by me good skins of the male and female, though the tail-feathers do not show their full length. The fact is that the longest feathers are removed before exposing the bird for sale, and appropriated for decorating the dress of warrior-chiefs in theatrical representations.

"The common Ring-necked Pheasant (*P. torquatus*) constitutes the fourth and most abundant kind found in the markets. The numbers of these birds that are sold every winter is wonderful. It was noticed that in birds apparently of the same age there was frequently a great disparity of size, almost giving one the idea of two species, though it is not improbable that this difference may be attributed to the different circumstances of food and locality.

"The Partridges found in the market at Tien Tsin are not unlike the English (*Perdix cinerea*), except that the marking on the breast of the Chinese bird is darker. They were abundant last winter. I am also assured that the Red-legged Partridge was shot in the hills north of Pekin, though this bird did not make its appearance in the market at Tien Tsin.

"Quails are very common; they are sold mostly alive, and trained for fighting, as in India. There is a second kind, which might be designated the Bush Quail,—a solitary bird smaller than the other, and speckled."

Mr. F. Buckland exhibited several specimens of the Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), and gave particulars of the various instances of its occurrence in several parts of England.

The Secretary called the attention of the Meeting to the living Aye-aye (*Chiromys madagascariensis*) which had been added to the Society's Menagerie in the preceding August. This valuable animal had been liberally presented to the Society by Edward Mellish, Esq., of the Mauritius (one of the members of the mission sent to Madagascar on the accession of Radama II. in 1861), and had reached England in safety by the overland mail on the 12th August.

The following papers were read:—

1. OBSERVATIONS ON THE LIVING AYE-AYE IN THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS. BY A. D. BARTLETT.

The subject of the following remarks is a fine adult female of the Aye-aye (*Chiromys madagascariensis*), which arrived in this country on the 12th of August last. On the voyage, this animal produced a young one, which lived about ten days. On arriving here she was in poor condition and very feeble; she soon, however, began to feed freely, and has now considerable strength, as is shown by the timber destroyed in the cage in which she is kept.

This animal is much blacker, and appears larger, than the male of this species now in the British Museum; the long hairs on the back of the neck, extending to the lower part of the body, have white points; these white points are thickest above, and become less numerous towards the limbs and tail, which appear quite black; the hairs of the tail, however, are white or grey at the roots (this can only be observed by separating them); the chin and throat are dirty white, which colour extends over the chest; the short hairs on the face are a mixture of dirty grey and white; the long hairs are black; the eyes light brown, surrounded by dark-coloured hairs; the nose and muzzle are of a dirty flesh-colour; the lips pink; the ears, shining black, and naked, but thickly studded with small protuberances; the feet and toes are sooty black, with the under surface and claws lighter, inclining to flesh-colour. The situation of the mammæ is remarkable: they are two in number, and placed at the lowest part of the abdomen (the animal differing in this respect entirely from the Lemurs and Bats, the teats of which are on the breast).

The Aye-aye sleeps during the day; and the body is then generally curved round and lying on its side, the tail is spread out and flattened over it, so that the head and body of the animal are almost entirely covered by the tail.

It is only at night that the Aye-aye exhibits any activity. I hear her crawling about and gnawing the timber when, to me, all is perfectly dark; and I have been surprised to find that upon the introduction of a light, directed to the face of the animal, she does not exhibit any signs of uneasiness, but stretches out her arm and tries to touch the lamp with her long fingers. She frequently hangs by